

2975 Laurel Street #20
San Diego, California 92104

July 30, 1988

Dear Joanie,

If I wait until I have time for a proper letter, I'll never get this off to you. I have unanswered mail as far as the eye can see, both personal and business for the Archives. The birthday party for which you should have received an announcement, went quite well. About one hundred people showed up--one came from Santa Barbara, another from Los Angeles. I received calls from well wishers in New York City and Los Angeles. Nearly \$1400 was raised to benefit the Lesbian & Gay Archives of San Diego.

In addition, several local community newspapers ran nice stories on me and the Archives (copies enclosed). I received commendations from the California State Assembly, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors, and the San Diego City Council. To top it all off, the Mayor issued a special proclamation declaring July 19, 1988 as "Jess Jessop Day" in the City of San Diego. Once again, I have been greatly honored by my people.

Healthwise, I am doing quite well. I seem to be coming out of that awful period of profound fatigue that was making it difficult for me to get anything done. I have met and talked extensively with Will and George (the two fellas in the article about healing AIDS) and feel very inspired by them. I never have accepted my diagnosis as an automatic death sentence, but it was great to find a couple of people who so clearly demonstrate the success of a holistic approach to well being. I was already doing many of the things that they recommend, and I've added a lot more since meeting them. They gave me an extensive reading list of books, two of which (Living With AIDS and Healing AIDS Naturally) I am now reading. So we'll see what we'll see.

I may have told you in our brief telephone conversation about going to the Pride Prom on June 10th, the beginning of Gay Pride Weekend in San Diego. My escort (date) was George Kelly, a friend who lived in Los Angeles, and a man whom I had met in Washington, D.C. last October during the March for Lesbian & Gay Rights. We were arrested together at the Supreme Court. Since then we had not only kept in touch but had grown quite close, participating in several events both here and in L.A. together. George and I were resplendent in our matching tuxedos at the Prom, and were pictured on the cover of the San Diego Gay Times.

To my knowledge, George was in good health, though I knew he was an insulin-dependent diabetic. George died on July 21, 1988 of pneumocystis carinii pneumonia (PCP) and complications due to his diabetes. We knew that George was HIV positive but he apparently had been asymptomatic up until this sudden onset of PCP. I've lost many friends to AIDS, but it never becomes any more acceptable, or any easier to handle the grief. This one was tougher than most due to our closeness. I can't think of George without the word "sweet" coming to mind. He was the very essence of sweet and gentle. I travel to L.A. tomorrow to attend a memorial gathering of his lesbian/gay extended family. The world is a lesser place.

Though I don't have your last letter before me at the moment, I do want to respond to one comment that you made regarding my AIDS diagnosis--something on the order of "...I guess it was inevitable given your lifestyle." Seems the word "lifestyle" gets overworked these days. Often coupled with "gay" as in

"the gay lifestyle" as if there was such a thing. Joanie, I know you well enough to know that you meant no harm or meanness by your comment. But, because you used the term, apparently without question, I'd like to give you some of my thoughts on the subject. It is simply that being gay/lesbian does not constitute or dictate a "lifestyle". Factors such as family background, educational level, career, income, and ethnicity are much more likely to influence lifestyle than sexual preference. I won't try to pin this on you, but I think that when most people refer to "the gay lifestyle", they are conjuring up some image of sexual obsession, endless rounds of parties, promiscuity, etc., as a way of life. I'm sure there are people who come close to this pattern maybe for a part of their life (whether gay or nongay). But that does not describe me or my friends.

The other thought that often comes right on the heels of the assumption of "a gay lifestyle", is that gay=AIDS. ("I suppose it was inevitable...") It is important to understand that the vast majority of gay men do not have AIDS nor are they infected with HIV. The reason that so many gay men are infected is simply that the virus got loose in the gay population (a fairly closed subset of society) and was shared for 7 to 10 years before anyone knew it was there--before anyone got sick. Gay people had no warning about this disease until well after the first cases were diagnosed. By then, most of the people who have subsequently been diagnosed were infected before the disease was even identified.

An interesting point is that gay men (and IV drug abusers), however unwittingly, became a giant test population which should benefit the rest of the people of the world (those who are not members of high-risk groups). For much of this year the new infection rate among gay men has been on a steady decline, a result, we believe, of "safe sex" teaching and a resulting behavior change. But during this same period, the rate of new syphilis cases among heterosexuals has skyrocketed in California (and I think, New York). The same activities that transmit syphilis (sex and IV drug abuse) transmit HIV (the suspected AIDS-causing virus). But I suppose it was inevitable, given the heterosexual lifestyle. Please forgive my facetiousness. But I think things are easier to understand when placed in a different perspective.

I wish AIDS on no one. But I think that out of the struggle with AIDS will (or could) come a new awareness about the nature of healing, the value of love in our lives, the destructiveness of being judgemental. Maybe we will have an opportunity to grasp the concept of the oneness of all that is, and stop placing artificial barriers between ourselves and others.

Joanie, I hope that you will accept my comments as an explanation rather than as a chastizement of yourself. Because I am gay, because I am a liberationist practiced in identifying homophobia, because I am a person living with AIDS, and because I am a health professional, I naturally think about such subjects more than people who are none of these things. Your thoughts are welcome.

Love in the struggle,

Your ole' buddy,
Bob